

WHEN HAVING A BETTER RECORD DIDN'T MEAN HOME FIELD ADVANTAGE, Part Two

By Andy Piascik

With the NFL-AFL merger in 1966 and the advent of the Super Bowl, pro football's postseason began to grow larger. Neither the NFL or AFL addressed the long-standing problem of how better to determine the home team in their respective Championship Games, however. In fact, almost another decade would go by until necessary changes were made.

Instead, both leagues continued with the rotation system that had ruled pro football's postseason since 1933. And as happened so many times previously, the teams that finished with the best regular season record in both leagues in 1966, the Packers and the Chiefs, had to go on the road in the title games. Bucking the odds clearly established over the previous 33 years, both won.

Even when the NFL realigned in 1967 and enlarged the playoffs, the same system was left intact. Again, evidence that something was amiss was immediately apparent. That year, the Rams finished 11-1-2 and won the Coastal Division of the Western Conference on the basis of a head to head tie-breaker over the Colts, who also finished 11-1-2. In the West's Central Division, meanwhile, the Packers finished first at 9-4-1.

Despite their superior record and even though they had beaten Green Bay in their regular season meeting, the Rams had to travel to Wisconsin to play the Western Conference Championship Game. After beating the Packers two weeks earlier in Los Angeles, the Rams lost and went home while the Packers went on to win the Super Bowl.

In 1968, the 10-4 Browns got to play at home in consecutive postseason games against teams with better records. They defeated the 12-2 Cowboys, who defeated Cleveland during the season, then lost to the 13-1 Colts in the NFL title game. The AFL title game also featured a team with the best record having to play on the road as 12-2 Oakland went to New York to play the 11-3 Jets. Again, not only did the Raiders have a better record than the Jets, they had beaten them in their one regular season matchup. The Jets won the rematch in the AFL Championship Game and then went on to win the Super Bowl.

The sites of games worked out just right in the NFL in 1969. In the AFL, meanwhile, the two second place finishers were added to the playoff mix as the younger league expanded the playoffs in its last season as an independent entity.

These were not wildcard teams in the way we have come to know them since. Had that been the case, the 8-6 Chargers of the West would have qualified instead of the 6-6-2 Oilers. Other than that glitch, the site of the AFL games also worked out just right.* So in the 1966-69 period, the '67 Packers and '68 Jets were the major beneficiaries of the antiquated rules, while the '67 Rams, '68 Raiders, and '68 Cowboys were clearly negatively impacted.

1969 was the only season in the 1966-74 period in which the home sites of all postseason games worked out the way they would have had teams been seeded by regular season

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performance. As might be expected with a still larger field and more games, the '70-74 period was one in which #1 seeds played #2 seeds in the first round and higher seeds played lower seeds on the road on a regular basis. Here is a recap of those seasons and how teams would have been paired had today's post-season rules been in force.**

1970 - AFC

WAS

#3 Bengals at #1 Colts (Colts won)
#4 Dolphins at #2 Raiders (Raiders won)

#2 Raiders at #1 Colts
(Colts won and then won the Super Bowl)

WOULD HAVE BEEN

#4 Dolphins at #1 Colts
#3 Bengals at #2 Raiders

1970- NFC

#2 49ers at #1 Vikings (49ers won)
#4 Lions at #3 Cowboys (Cowboys won)

#3 Cowboys at #2 49ers
(Cowboys won and then lost in the Super Bowl)

WOULD HAVE BEEN

#4 Lions at #1 Vikings
#3 Cowboys at #2 49ers

Things worked out in the AFC as the two top seeds won and then played each other in the AFC title game at #1 seed Baltimore. In the NFC, on the other hand, the Vikings should have opened with the #4 seed Lions, a team they beat twice that year. The Cowboys clearly benefited from playing the #4 seed at home while #1 and #2 squared off. Under the current rules, assuming the Vikings had beaten the Lions, the Cowboys would have had to win road games in San Francisco and Minnesota to get to the Super Bowl.

1971 - AFC

WAS

#2 Dolphins at #1 Chiefs (Dolphins won)
#4 Colts at #3 Browns (Colts won)

#4 Colts at #2 Dolphins
(Dolphins won and then lost in the Super Bowl)

WOULD HAVE BEEN

#4 Colts at #1 Chiefs
#3 Browns at #2 Dolphins

1971 - NFC

WAS

#2 Cowboys at #1 Vikings (Cowboys won)

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#4 Redskins at #3 49ers (49ers won)

#3 49ers at #2 Cowboys
(Cowboys won and then won the Super Bowl)

WOULD HAVE BEEN

#4 Redskins at #1 Vikings

#3 49ers at #2 Cowboys

In both conferences the two top seeds played in the first round. In each instance, the #1 seed got to play at home and lost. Still, had the matchups been by seed, anything could have happened.

1972 - AFC

WAS

#4 Browns at #1 Dolphins (Dolphins won)

#3 Raiders at #2 Steelers (Steelers won)

#1 Dolphins at #3 Steelers
(Dolphins won and then won the Super Bowl)

WOULD HAVE BEEN

SAME

1972 - NFC

WAS

#2 Packers at #1 Redskins (Redskins won)

#4 Cowboys at #3 49ers (Cowboys won)

#4 Cowboys at #1 Redskins
(Redskins won and then lost in the Super Bowl)

WOULD HAVE BEEN

#4 Cowboys at #1 Redskins

#3 49ers at #2 Packers

Things worked out in the AFC as the #1 14-0 Dolphins defeated the #3 seed Steelers despite having to play in Pittsburgh. The Packers missed out on playing a home game against the 4gers and a better chance to advance. The Cowboys got to play #3 in the first round instead of #1 Washington but ended up losing to the Redskins in the conference championship game.

1973 -AFC

WAS

#2 Bengals at #1 Dolphins (Dolphins won)

#4 Steelers at #3 Raiders (Raiders won)

#3 Raiders at #1 Dolphins
(Dolphins won and then won the Super Bowl)

WOULD HAVE BEEN

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#4 Steelers at #1 Dolphins
#3 Raiders at #2 Bengals

1973- NFC

WAS

#4 Redskins at #1 Vikings (Vikings won)
#2 Rams at #3 Cowboys (Cowboys won)

#1 Vikings at #3 Cowboys
(Vikings won and then lost in the Super Bowl)

WOULD HAVE BEEN

#4 Redskins at #1 Vikings
#3 Cowboys at #2 Rams

Instead of hosting the Raiders, the Bengals had to play the best team in football on the road. Since they ended up losing to Miami anyway, however, their grievance is not as valid as some others. The Cowboys played two home games against higher seeds, while the Rams missed out on a home game and a better chance at a spot in the NFC title game.

1974 - AFC

WAS

#2 Dolphins at #1 Raiders (Raiders won)
#4 Bills at #3 Steelers (Steelers won)

#3 Steelers at #1 Raiders
(Steelers won and then won the Super Bowl)

WOULD HAVE BEEN

#4 Bills at #1 Raiders
#3 Steelers at #2 Dolphins

1974- NFC

WAS

#2 Cardinals at #1 Vikings (Vikings won)
#4 Redskins at #3 Rams (Rams won)

#3 Rams at #1 Vikings
(Vikings won and then lost in the Super Bowl)

WOULD HAVE BEEN

#4 Redskins at #1 Vikings
#3 Rams at #2 Cardinals

With a major problem in the AFC and a not-so-minor one in the NFC, this is the season that finally tilted the balance toward the changes that were introduced the following year. In the AFC, it would have been far tougher for the Steelers to advance to the Super Bowl had they had to go through both Miami and Oakland. In the Bills, they also got to open at home against a team that was vastly inferior to the other AFC teams. Instead of opening with Buffalo, the Raiders instead had to play back to back games against two strong teams.

In the NFC, the #1 and #2 seeds again played in the first round. The Cardinals missed out on what should have been a home game. Making matters worse, they didn't just have to play on the road, they had to play in the Minnesota cold. The top-seeded Vikings got to play at home in both of their games. The Rams hosted a higher seed in the first round, then lost on the road to #1.

In spite of glitches every season, the 1970-74 period was free of the worst case scenario: a #1 seed having to play on the road and losing. All of the #1 seeds either advanced to the Super Bowl despite having to play on the road, or they lost at home. And in no season did a team advance to the Super Bowl by playing and winning two home games against higher seeded teams. Still, in seven of ten cases, the #1 and #2 seeds played each other in the first round.

Although things could have been worse, the problems in some years were substantial, most notably Pittsburgh's draw of Buffalo in 1974. The Vikings might have made it further in the NFC in 1970 and 1971 under the new rules. Other aggrieved teams like the 1973 Rams still would have had big obstacles in front of them (in their case, a road trip to Minnesota for the NFC title game). What would have been the grossest injustice of all was averted in 1972 when the 14-0 Dolphins defeated 11-3 Pittsburgh despite having to play on the road.

*The seedings that year were based on the same premise that has been in force since the 1970 realignment, that is, that a first place team always gets home field advantage when it plays a second place or wildcard team. Thus the 10-4 Jets hosted the 11-3 Chiefs because they finished first in the East while Kansas City was second in the West.

**The one flaw that remained with the 1975 change was that a #1 seed could not play the wildcard team in the first round if the two were from the same division. That was not changed until 1990. In the interim, there were numerous occasions in which the pairings would have been different.

REPEAT THREE-PEAT, ALMOST

By Jim Campbell

Three-peats in sports are quite rare, especially in the NFL, although there are those who think the New England Patriots can repeat a repeat this coming season.

In 1929, 1930, and 1931--before there were divisional playoffs in the NFL and champions were declared by virtue of winning percentage--the Green Bay Packers were crowned league champions after each of those seasons.

In major league baseball, the Philadelphia Athletics of Connie Mack won American League pennants in 1929, 1930, and 1931--this was well before George Steinbrenner directed the fortunes of the New York Yankees. In '29 and '30, the A's won the World Championship--defeating the Chicago Cubs 4 games to 1 in '29 and the St. Louis Cardinals 4 games to 2 in '30. They met the Cardinals again in 1931. The series went 7 games, but the Cardinals won the final game by a 4-2 score.

THE TERESHINSKIS OF GEORGIA

By Jim Campbell

Mention University of Georgia football and good ol' "southern" names like Francis Asbury Tarkenton, Buck Belue, and Rex Robinson come to mind.

How, then, have there been three generations of Joe Tereshinskis (a decidedly un-Georgia type name) suiting up for the Bulldogs?

The roots of the situation go back to the days when sturdy boys from the Anthracite Coal Region of Northeast Pennsylvania were highly prized below the Mason-Dixon Line. In the 1940s, Charley Trippi of Pittston, PA, was something of a trailblazer, not to mention a legend at UGA. Joe Tereshinski of nearby Newport Township High School (Glen Lyon, PA) followed Trippi's trail to Athens.

Joe went on to play eight post-World War II seasons for the Washington Redskins as a rugged two-way end and linebacker and remained in the District area. When it became time for his son, Joe Jr., to matriculate, he chose Georgia--or vice versa. After his playing career, Joe Jr. became a member of the Georgia coaching staff.

A third Joe Tereshinski--Joe III, naturally--played creditably as a replacement quarterback in 2005 when Bulldogs starter D.J. Shockley was injured in midseason.

DARRELL DESS

By Andy Piascik

When Darrell Dess came out of North Carolina State University in 1958, he didn't know if he could make it in pro football or not. He was an 11th round draft choice, and there were only so many jobs available in the 12-team NFL. Dess made it all the way through training camp with the Redskins, only to be let go in the final cut before the season.

After sizing up NFL competition all summer, Dess was confident he could make it if given another chance. That chance came a short while later when the Steelers signed him in time for the start of the season. Considering that he went on to have a 12-year career in the NFL, that confidence was well-placed.

At 6'0" and 245 pounds, Dess was just about the ideal size to play guard in the late 1950's. Wrestling skills that he had honed at NC State also came in handy. Those skills gave Dess a solid foundation in maneuvering opponents in the desired direction. His wrestling techniques proved especially valuable as Dess's career progressed and opposing linemen got bigger and stronger.

"They're definitely similar," Dess said of wrestling and playing on the line. "We didn't lift weights much in those days and my wrestling background helped me when going up against a guy like Big Daddy Lipscomb." Among the wrestlers Dess competed against in college was one Henry Jordan of the University of Virginia, a standout defensive tackle who Dess would play against throughout his NFL career.

Dess played football, basketball, and baseball at New Castle High School in Pennsylvania. Recruited to NC State, he helped the Wolfpack to a 7-1-2 record and an Atlantic Coast Conference championship in his senior year. He didn't wrestle until he got to college because his high school didn't have a wrestling team.

"One of my instructors in college was Al Crawford, who had been an Olympic wrestler. He encouraged me to go out and I liked it and did pretty well at it."

Dess played in every game his rookie year after being signed by the Steelers. At the end of the 1958 season he was traded to the Giants, a move he didn't mind at all even though he grew up only 50 miles from Pittsburgh. The Giants were the defending Eastern Conference champions when he joined them, and they finished first in four of the next five seasons as well. Rarely has a team been as popular in New York as the Giants were in the late 1950's and early 1960's.

"The people in New York were great to us," Dess recalled of his early years with the Giants. "Any time we went to a restaurant, a bar, or a night club, we always got special treatment. And the fans were very supportive."

As might be expected, Dess was closest to the other members of the offensive line. It was an excellent group that at different times included Roosevelt Brown, Jack Stroud, Ray Wietcha, and Greg Larson, all of whom played at least ten seasons in the NFL. Dess especially marveled

at Brown, a teammate for six seasons. "I had never seen a guy that big run that fast."

One of the keys to the unit's success was the ability of players to play more than one position. "I remember Jack moved to tackle even though he had played guard for about ten years. And when Ray retired, Greg moved from tackle to center and did a great job," Dess said of Larson, who was probably his best friend on the team. Dess himself also shifted to right guard from his usual left guard position when needed.

Although he spent more time with the other offensive linemen than his other teammates, Dess saw no evidence of the split between the offense and defense that is a part of the lore of those Giants' teams. "Guys from both units got along well," he said. "I was friends with a lot of the guys on the defense. A lot of us lived close to Yankee Stadium and we hung around together, offense and defense.

"I remember a lot of times when Dick Lynch entertained us on the piano," Dess said of New York's outstanding cornerback. "If we were somewhere and there was a piano, he would sit down and start playing. He never used sheet music and he could play anything. All he had to do was hear a tune and he could play it."

Although New York was very successful during those years, the Giants never won an NFL championship while Dess was with the team. They made it to four title games but lost each time.

"That was frustrating," Dess said, "to come that close four times. The most frustrating was against the Bears in '63. The other times, we lost to two of the best teams ever. But we all felt we were the better team in '63.

"Don't get me wrong, they were all frustrating," Dess went on. "One year [in the 1961 regular season] we went up to Green Bay and they beat us in a real close game when we fumbled the ball away in the last few minutes and they scored. Then, a few weeks later, same two teams, same field, and they shut us out, beat us bad [37-0]. There's not much you can say about that. "

Unexpectedly, the bottom fell out in 1964 as the Giants finished 2-10-2 and in last place. "We were not very popular then," Dess said. "It was bad." As bad it was, Dess was still unhappy when he was traded to Washington in 1965. He played just that season and one game the following year before the Redskins traded him back to New York.

"I was so happy when they told me they'd traded me to the Giants," Dess recalled. The Giants had bounced back to 7-7 in 1965, but at 1-12-1 1966 turned out to be the worst season in the 81-year history of the franchise.

"That was a long year," Dess said. "A lot like 1964. You're a professional and you do the best you can because that's what you're paid to do, but near the end of the year the attitude in the locker room was that we couldn't wait until the year was over. You almost can't help it, that's how bad it was."

The team did better during the last three seasons of his career and Dess thinks one of the big reasons was New York's acquisition of Fran Tarkenton. "Some guys didn't like Tarkenton, but I did," Dess said. "With him it was more like it was when we had Tittle and Conerly at quarterback."

Tarkenton and Dess were involved in a play in 1967 in a game against the Bears that resulted in the rarest of rarities for an offensive lineman: a touchdown. Needless to say, it was the only touchdown of Dess's career.

"On a rollout, if Fran decided to run, he would yell 'Go,'" Dess recalled. "Against Chicago, either he didn't have time to say it or I didn't hear him because the next thing I know he goes by me heading for the goal line. He got stopped short but they didn't get him down, they just sort of stood him up, and he was able to lateral the ball to me. I caught it at about the three and went into the end zone."

To this day, however, Dess lives with a painful reminder of the play. "I got knocked down and one of the Bears landed on me and put his knee in my back, and it's bothered me ever since." In fact, Dess has had 19 major surgeries over the years, many of which were football related. However, he is quick to point out that "if I had to do it over again, I would."

In 1969, Dess and his family were involved in a serious car accident outside of New Castle. He was pinned in the car until help arrived and suffered a serious leg injury. Dess's recovery was long and difficult, but head coach Allie Sherman and former teammate Alex Webster, who took over when Sherman was fired that summer, allowed him to rehabilitate on his own.

Dess worked himself back to where he was able to play in the season opener, a comeback victory over the Super Bowl-bound Minnesota Vikings that seemed to portend a successful season. The Giants lost seven consecutive games in midseason, however, and were eliminated from contention before Thanksgiving. By then, Dess, Larson, and Joe Morrison were the only Giants left from the 1956-63 heyday.

Dess's leg bothered him throughout the year, and he ended up missing eight games. When he did play, he knew he was not the same as he had been before the accident. With a 30-51-3 record and no winning seasons over six seasons and the glory years a fading memory, playing for the Giants was also not as enjoyable. Sherman was constantly booed at Yankee Stadium in his last years as coach, and Dess recalled that it wasn't long before some fans gave Webster the same treatment.

Back in New Castle for the 1970 offseason, Dess decided to retire. He has lived in his hometown ever since, and worked for a number of years as the city's director of parks and recreation. He remains friends with Larson and some of his other former teammates, and has also stayed in touch with a family that owns a restaurant that was a favorite hang-out when the Giants trained at Fairfield University in Connecticut.

"Dick Lynch called me not too long ago from the place, which is still there. It got me thinking about how good the food was." It also reminded him of his time with the Giants. "We had a good time together and we had a lot of good football players."

KEEP A-GOIN': The Life of Lone Star Dietz

by Tom Benjay, (Tuxedo Press)

more info visit: www.lonestardietz.com Review by John Vorperian.

"No coach ever won a game by what he knows: it's what his players learned."

--AMOS ALONZO STAGG

Is the key to Wins and Championships having scholars and wags on your squad? As football researchers we know an assembled brain trust won't result in an automatic perfect season. William 'Lone Star' Dietz's teams did not have franchise players but he gave them designs and schemes that successfully befuddled the opposition. In addition to upping his men's athletic confidence with a novel playbook, Dietz insisted on having the entire student body on board in support of the gridiron program. Where ever he went Wazzu-Washington State College (today's Washington State University Cougars), Louisiana Polytechnic Institute (now Louisiana Tech Bulldogs), Wyoming Cowboys, or Reading Pennsylvania's Albright College, Dietz got the campus abuzz in grid gab. Media control and mental spin done well before 24 hour sports talk radio, video highlight game centers, and team psychologists, such tactics speaks volumes about this first modern football coach.

KEEP A-GOIN': The Life of Lone Star Dietz easily reads like a screenplay. William Dietz's dynamic personality and compelling life tale makes one wonder does KEEP A-GOIN' get to movie theaters in 2008 or '09? Author Tom Benjay has done a masterful job constructing a detailed approach on Dietz. Or as we say here in the Big Apple, "Four Stars for 'Lone Star'."

Who was William 'Lone Star' Dietz? He was a man of many talents, graphic artist, theatrical actor, college instructor, AKC enthusiast, dog breeder, singer, semi-pro baseball player, movie producer, and football coach. From 1909 to 1911 Dietz played for the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. The Pennsylvania academy was an early inter-collegiate football powerhouse. From 1893 to the Teens the tiny Keystone State School garnered a winning reputation besting most opponents and keeping a tight score against behemoth eastern university powers. Carlisle produced a number of All-Americans, Isaac Seneca, Frank Hudson, Charles Williams, Wilson Charles, Albert Exendine, and in particular-megastar-Jim Thorpe.

Dietz went from star tackle to the coaching ranks. He remained with Carlisle as an Assistant Coach and learned from the legendary Glenn S. "Pop" Warner. 1915 marked his initial year as a Head Coach.

Washington State College became the beneficiary. By 1916 everything was coming up roses for W.S.C. as Dietz got his team to Pasadena. The Tournament of Roses game resulted in a Wazzu 14-0 upset over Brown University led by Fritz Pollard.

Curse of the Bambino, well how about Curse of Lone Star? To author Benjay's credit KEEP A-GOIN' devotes an intriguing chapter on a heady hex. In sum, since Dietz's stinging and surprising separation from W.S.C, the Crimson and Grey have not won another Rose Bowl.

Representing New England in the NFL and bringing the Broken Shoelace play to the pro game Lone Star's coaching skills were employed by George Preston Marshall's universe. Tom Benjay

delightfully regales the 1933 Boston Braves a/k/a Redskins under Dietz's leadership.

Aside from the football career Lone Star's family upbringing, heritage, and domestic life are set forth. Utilizing multiple sources Benjey has admirably written a comprehensive account of Dietz's parentage.

Dietz may be the only individual involved with maternity proceedings brought by the U.S. Government no less. Even today Dietz's background is a cause of other litigation as activists seek to strip the Washington club's current moniker.

KEEP A-GOIN' will put you on the right track in learning more about this clever coach. Last year William 'Lone Star' Dietz's name was on the College Football Hall of Fame nominee ballot for the first time. He missed induction by a single vote. Don't miss this compelling biography.

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The Hall of Very Good 2006

Classes of 2003, 2004, and 2005

Maxie Baughan	Jim Benton	Gene Brito
John Brodie	Jack Butler	Gino Cappelletti
Lavie Dilweg	Pat Fischer	Chris Hanberger
Pat Harder	Bob Hayes	Gene Hickerson
Bill Howton	Jerry Kramer	Floyd Little
Jim Marshall	Al Nesser	Tommy Nobis
Pete Retzlaff	Dave Robinson	Johnny Robinson
Tobin Rote	Lou Rymkus	Del Shofner
Duke Slater	Mac Speedie	Mick Tingelhoff
Al Wistert		

Happily, the election of some great players to the Pro Football Hall of Fame has only been postponed for a year or two, but some excellent players will never find their busts in Canton. PFRA makes no judgment on whether those passed over were actually Hall of Fame-caliber players or not. What we do insist upon is that there are many, many players who deserve recognition as far better than the average.

As a way to honor these players, we hereby create The Hall of Very Good. The Classes of 2003-05 were selected by the votes of the PFRA membership. Players chosen can not be enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame, and they must be passed over so many times that any ultimate enshrinement appears doubtful. Should any member of the Hall of Very Good be subsequently elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame, he will immediately and joyfully be stricken from the HoVG.

In the past, two HOVG electees - Carl Eller and Bennie Friedman - were subsequently elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

CHUCK CONERLY

The Giants' quarterback for 14 seasons, he led the team to an NFL championship in 1956 and was chosen Player of the Year in 1959 by both the AP and NEA.

JOHN HADL

Hadl quarterbacked the Chargers from 1962-72. He was All-NFL in 1973 with the Rams, was chosen to six Pro Bowls and AFL All-Star Games. He and Lance Alworth were one of the great pass-catch combinations of all time.

CHUCK HOWLEY

Still the only player to be named Super Bowl MVP while playing for the losing team, the Cowboys' great linebacker earned all-NFL honors six times and was a consensus choice three times.

ALEX KARRAS

Before he became a TV star, Karras was one of the top defensive tackles in football. In 12 seasons with the Lions, he was picked to four Pro Bowls and named all-NFL four times.

GENE "BIG DADDY" LIPSCOMB

The Colts' D-line had Marchetti and Donovan, but "Big Daddy" was all-NFL in the title years 1958-59. Only his tragic death kept him from more legends.

KYLE ROTE

A great college halfback at SMU, injuries curtailed his pro career as a running back. Rote became the Giants' top receiver during the 1950s grabbing 300 passes.

DICK STANFEL

In only seven seasons with the Lions and Redskins, Stanfel was all-NFL five times and chosen to five Pro Bowls. He was named to the All-1950s team by the Hall of Fame electors.

OTIS TAYLOR

Taylor's 46-yard TD reception wrapped up Super Bowl IV for Kansas City. Great combination with Len Dawson. Chosen for one AFL All-Star Game and two Pro Bowls.

FUZZY THURSTON

With Jerry Kramer, Thurston pulled out of the line to lead the "Lombardi Sweep," the key to Green Bay's championship offense. Consensus All-NFL in 1961.

DAN TOWLER

Led NFL in rushing in 1952 with 894 yards and a 5.7 average gain. Named to four Pro Bowls in only six seasons, all with L.A. Rams. Member of famed "Bull Elephant Backfield."

LEROY KELLY

By Roger Gordon

Originally published in *The Orange and Brown Report*, March 2006.

When Jim Brown abruptly retired from the Cleveland Browns in the summer of 1966 to pursue an acting career, Leroy Kelly lucked out. While the Browns' great fullback was overseas filming *The Dirty Dozen*, Kelly was getting dirty himself - as in more playing time and added grass stains on his uniform.

"[Head coach] Blanton [Collier] told me, 'This is your opportunity to be the starter,'" Kelly recalled. "That was my chance. That's fate, destiny. And I took advantage of it."

With Brown off to the movies, the 6-foot, 195-pound Kelly took the talented Ernie Green's place at halfback while Green replaced Brown at fullback. Kelly stepped in and carried the torch quite well. He knew he belonged in the Browns' backfield in the very first game of 1966 in Washington against the Redskins.

"I scored on a 29-yard touchdown run off the left side," he said. Kelly's first-quarter TD ignited the Browns, who trailed 14-0 at the time. They won in a rout, 38-14. "After that game I said, 'Well, I think I have arrived. This is going to be nice, I like this.'"

Kelly had his first of three consecutive 1,000-yard seasons in '66 with 1,141, finishing second by less than 100 yards to Chicago's Gale Sayers for the NFL rushing title. His 2,014 all-purpose yards that year rank second in Browns history. Kelly helped keep the Browns in the thick of the race in the Eastern Conference. They finished 9-5 but were dethroned as Eastern Conference champions by the Dallas Cowboys. Kelly rushed for an NFL-best 1,205 yards in 1967, but the Browns were trounced, 52-14, by the Cowboys in the playoffs.

Kelly and Green were both picked for the Pro Bowl in 1966 and '67. It was an accomplishment that is quite a rarity.

"Anytime two backs in the same backfield can go to the Pro Bowl the same year," Kelly said, "is a tribute to the offensive line."

Kelly gained 1,239 yards in 1968, once again tops in the league, in a year in which he was named NFL MVP by an organization known as the Maxwell Club. Kelly's 46-yard touchdown catch from Bill Nelsen, and 35-yard scoring run, helped the Browns gain some revenge on Dallas in the playoffs as they beat the Cowboys, 31-20. Kelly was held to 28 yards rushing the next week as the Browns were blasted, 34-0, by Baltimore in the NFL Championship Game, denying them a shot at Joe Namath and the New York Jets in Super Bowl III. Kelly scored a remarkable 50 touchdowns - 43 rushing - from 1966-68. He led Cleveland in rushing yards the next four years. In 1969, he led the Browns back to the brink of the Super Bowl, including another playoff win over Dallas, but they fell to the Minnesota Vikings in the NFL title game in frozen Metropolitan Stadium. Two more playoff defeats in the next three seasons followed.

Looking like they were headed to the postseason once again in 1973, the Browns faltered at the

end and missed out. Kelly was waived before the start of training camp in 1974. He was picked up by Oakland but failed to make the Raiders' final cut. He caught on with the World Football League, as a running back for the Chicago Fire that year and as an assistant coach for the Philadelphia Bell the next, before the troubled league folded.

Born in Philadelphia, Kelly did not start playing organized football until he attended Simon Gratz High, a small public school. He was actually the starting quarterback as a junior and senior, and led his team to a 5-1-1 record his last year.

"I was a scrambling quarterback," he said. "Our offense called for me to do a lot of running,"

That was a premonition of things to come.

Although he had a feeler from the University of Michigan, Kelly accepted a full scholarship to tiny Morgan State University in Baltimore. He was switched to running back after a couple weeks because the Grizzly Bears had two talented sophomore quarterbacks. Kelly earned a starting position midway through his freshman season and never looked back. His days as a scrambling quarterback in high school made the transition to running back smooth. Kelly actually played both ways in college, as many players did back then. He was a cornerback, and a good one at that.

"I was known more for my play at corner," he said. "Actually, I thought the Browns drafted me as a defensive back."

After the upstart American Football League completely ignored him in their draft, Kelly was sure he would be coaching, and teaching physical education, in high school somewhere soon. But it did not workout that way.

"A guy named Buddy Young, who was working for the Colts, and my college coach, Earl Banks, were good friends," Kelly recalled. "The Colts were high on a back named Tony Lorick from Arizona State. They drafted him. Young knew the Browns' head scout and put a good word in for me."

The Browns drafted Kelly in the eighth round. He learned of the news while relaxing in his dorm room.

"A friend of mine came in with a newspaper," he recalled. "He said, 'Hey man, you were drafted by the Browns.' I thought he was kidding. I said, 'Yeah, right.' He showed me the paper, and sure enough it was in there."

Kelly was relegated primarily to punt and kickoff returns his first two years, mainly because Brown and Green were firmly ingrained in the backfield. Kelly did a fine job, including three punt returns for touchdowns.

"I got to start one game at halfback my first two seasons," said Kelly, referring to a Saturday night home game in 1965 against the Pittsburgh Steelers in which he lined up alongside the great Jim Brown. The Browns won a thriller in the final minute as Kelly caught two key passes from Frank Ryan on the winning drive.

"It rained the whole game," Kelly said. "I'll never forget it."

Kelly also got to be a part of what remains Cleveland's last professional sports championship, the 1964 Browns team that stunned the Baltimore Colts for the NFL title.

"We had a good chemistry of players," Kelly said, "but everybody thought we were going to get killed by the Colts, and we turned around and shut them out, and won the championship. For a rookie, the first year, to be on a team that won the championship was just great. There was nothing like it."

Kelly recalled a rather laid back relationship he had with The Great One - Brown.

"He didn't say much to rookies," he said, "until he figured whether or not you were going to help the team. He had a big presence."

Like Kelly, wide receiver Paul Warfield was a rookie on the 1964 Browns. To show just how times have changed since the preESPN days and before, Kelly not only had never met Warfield before joining the Browns, he had never *heard* of the great talent from Ohio State University.

After his playing days were through, Kelly returned home and ventured into the business world. He and former Green Bay Packers great Herb Adderly co-owned a restaurant and nightclub in Philadelphia for four years. Kelly then bought two Burger Kings before retiring for good in 1993.

These days, the 63-year-old Kelly resides in Willingboro, New Jersey, with his wife of 23 years, Betty, and their 18-year-old son, William. The couple has another son, Leroy II, a senior at Wilmington College near Cincinnati. Kelly has two children from a previous marriage, 38-year-old daughter Felicia, who lives in Cleveland, and 37-year-old son David, a radio and television broadcaster for the minor league Memphis Redbirds. Kelly spends his time testing his 12 handicap in fundraiser golf tournaments, signing at card shows, traveling and deep-sea fishing. He still follows the Browns and said he will always be a fan of the team.

Kelly ranks second in Browns annals with 7,274 rushing yards and also combined net yards with 12,329. He was a Pro Bowler every year from 1966-71 and was enshrined into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1994.

Kelly's peers heaped praise galore upon him.

"Leroy was the type of running back who had the speed and the agility to fake you out and make you look awful bad, but he also had the power to run you over," said Joe Scarpati, a safety with the Philadelphia Eagles from 1964-69, in an NFL Films documentary on Kelly.

"I think the thing that Leroy had as a player was his ability to hit a hole extremely quick, probably as quick as any running back that I can remember," recalled Fred Hoaglin, who played center for Cleveland in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in the same documentary. "He could get out of his stance real quick, hit the hole so fast that he was hitting the hole as it was opening. He might've only had a foot of daylight, but as he went into it, the hole opened wider, and he would pop through those things, and he had the quickness and the speed to run away from people once he got into the secondary."

How does one go from competing at a small high school, and small college, to becoming a Hall of Famer?

"You do it with a lot of good fortune," Kelly said. "If Jim Brown wouldn't have retired, I wouldn't be in the Hall of Fame. I was blessed. My injuries were very few, I can still walk good and I had a lot of good teammates."

Kelly may have enjoyed some good fortune, but at the same time he was an awfully talented running back. There are those who say it is better to be lucky than good. Leroy Kelly didn't have to worry.

He was both.

When Eagles Dared

Buddy Ryan built one of the NFL's most dynamic teams in the late 1980s, so why did Philadelphia fail to win a title?

By Ed Gruver

From 1988-90, the Philadelphia Eagles fielded one of the great defenses in modern NFL history and a quarterback considered to be the game's "ultimate weapon."

The defense of Reggie White, Jerome Brown, Eric Allen and Co. routinely ranked among the league leaders in fewest points allowed and most turnovers forced, and intimidated opponents with "46" schemes filled with exotic blitzes and exacting hits.

QB Randall Cunningham? All he did was set an NFL record for most yards rushing by a quarterback, and twice led the league in average yards per carry. Few who witnessed it will forget the Monday night magic he engineered against the New York Giants when he bounced off a hard hit from Carl Banks and recovered to throw a touchdown pass to electrify an Eagles' crowd at Veterans Stadium.

"When you talk about the Eagles," Washington coach Joe Gibbs told Sports Illustrated in January, 1991, "you talk about a collection of fantastic athletes on both sides of the ball, guys capable of taking over the game with their athletic ability."

Backed by the bombast of head coach Buddy Ryan, the Eagles rode a combination of talent and freak plays to 31 regular season wins from 1988-90 and dared to dream of Super Bowl glory. So why did "Buddyball" fail to win a playoff game in three tries and claim just one NFC Eastern Conference championship, and why was Ryan dismissed following the 1990 season?

Maybe the answer lay in a quote uttered by then Giants coach Bill Parcells prior to a crucial late December matchup with Buddy's boys in 1989.

"I don't think Philadelphia can (win a Super Bowl)," he told Jerry Izenberg for the latter's book, *No Medals For Trying*. "I think their structure with the kind of guys they got and how they do things can only take them so far."

The Birds went on to beat the Giants, 24-17, that day at the wind-swept Meadowlands, and did so in typical Buddy fashion. The Eagles scored two defensive touchdowns in the first quarter, the first coming courtesy of a sack and forced fumble by White that was scooped off the icy carpet by blitzing defensive back William Frizell, who then lateraled to safety Andre Waters for a score. The second TO came minutes later when the Birds' other end, Clyde Simmons, picked off a Phil Simms pass and returned it for a TD.

The Eagles capped their strange win with a 91-yard punt in the fourth quarter by Cunningham, who had been a kicker in college. The punt pinned the Giants deep in their own territory, and after the Eagles defense held, fullback Keith Byars tunneled into the end zone for the winning score.

Despite the defeat, the Giants rallied to win the NFC East when Philly faltered down the stretch, and the Eagles' tendency of coming up short in critical games made Parcels' comment seem prophetic. Years later, another NFL coach later picked up on Parcels' theme.

"The only problem (Ryan has) had is he's still the defensive coach even when he's the head coach," then Denver Broncos boss Wade Phillips told Pro Football magazine in a 1994 interview. Phillips spent three years as Ryan's defensive coordinator in Philadelphia, and was part of a talented defensive staff that included current Tennessee head coach Jeff Fisher.

"He blames the offense if they don't do good," Phillips said of Ryan. "It's them or us, kind of the world against our defense. That's how he gets the defensive players feeling they are part of his group. It's like, 'We're going to stick together and overcome all the odds, even our offense, even our special teams, and anybody else who's against us.'

"When it came down to the big games, they couldn't do it (pull together) even at home."

The Eagles dropped a pair of playoff decisions at home, losing to Los Angeles in 1989 and Washington in 1990. Both games could be considered upsets, albeit minor ones, and the latter led to Buddy's demise as Birds' boss.

But why didn't the Eagles achieve more? If that hoary old chestnut that defense wins championships is true, then Philly should have at least won an NFC title, if not a Super Bowl.

On paper, they were comparable in talent to the 1990 Giants and '91 Redskins squads that won world championships. Ryan had rebuilt the Birds' defense into one of the great units of his day, and the offense featured a QB whose running, passing and punting skills led Sports Illustrated to dub him the NFL's "Ultimate Weapon." This at a time when Joe Montana was still quarterbacking the 49ers and Dan Marino was directing the Dolphins.

There's no denying the athleticism the Birds boasted on both sides of the ball. By 1990, White had succeeded Bears' middle linebacker Mike Singletary as the game's best defensive player. Philly's front four of White and Simmons at end, Brown and Mike Pitts at tackle was the NFL's best since the 1985 Bears, a unit also bossed by Ryan. The linebacking corps listed solid starters in middle man Byron Evans and outside linebacker Seth Joyner, and the secondary featured a standout cover corner in Allen, and hard-hitting safeties in Waters and Wes Hopkins.

As a unit, it became one of the most feared in the league, and the Birds reached a savage peak in 1990 with a 28-14 Monday night win over Washington in the celebrated "bodybag" game in which several Redskins were carried from the field and running back Brian Mitchell was forced to play QB.

"When they get going on you, it's tough," Gibbs told SI.

On offense, Cunningham's triple-threat skills made him one of the more unique talents the game had ever seen, and Keith Jackson was arguably the NFL's best tight end from 1988-90. Byars was versatile in his roles as a runner, receiver, and blocker, and Cris Carter was a big-play receiver at wideout.

Ryan arrived in 1986 following his Super Bowl campaign with Chicago, and within two years had taken Philadelphia from doormat to division champs. The Eagles went 10-6 in 1988, beating the

Giants twice during the regular season to win the NFC East on a tie-breaker.

There was no disgrace in dropping their first playoff game, the 1988 "Fog Bowl" in Chicago's Soldier Field on New Year's Eve, The Eagles were new to the postseason; the Bears were veterans, so the 20-12 outcome wasn't totally unexpected, particularly since it was the Bears who held the lead when the fog rolled in at halftime and obliterated everyone's field vision for the remainder of the game.

The Eagles should have repeated as division champs in 1989; their aforementioned win over the Giants late in the season gave them the division lead via the tiebreaker. But the Birds stumbled down the stretch, losing to New Orleans 30-20 in Week 15 while the Giants went unbeaten in their final three games.

Cunningham led the team in rushing for the third straight season, a feat no QB had accomplished since the 1940s. The offense was hampered by the loss of star wideout Mike Quick due to double knee surgery in October, but the defense picked up the slack. Simmons and Brown combined for 26 sacks and Allen led the league with eight interceptions. A capsule of the Eagles' season came in a Week Three game against San Francisco. For three quarters the Birds roughed up the reigning Super Bowl champs. White, Brown, Simmons, and Pitts poured in on QB Joe Montana, sacking him several times and knocking him to the rock-hard carpet of the Vet on numerous other occasions.

The fourth quarter was another story. Speed-reading the Eagle defense, Montana made like Joe Cool and threw three late TDs to lead the 4gers to a startling 38-28 comeback win.

In a first round playoff game on New Year's Eve, the Eagles fell victim to another West Coast team, the supposedly "soft" Los Angeles Rams. Proving Ram tough, L.A. overcame a cold rain to scorch Philadelphia for 14 first-period points to coach John Robinson and QB Jim Everett and fell, 21-7.

The Birds' story was much the same in 1990. Philly faltered in the beginning, opening the season 1-3. Cunningham again led the team in rushing, finishing with 942 yards and just missing becoming the first QB to run and pass for 1,000 yards or more in the same season. The Eagles finished second in the division with a 10-6 record, then came up short again in the playoffs with a 20-6 loss at home to Washington on New Year's Eve.

Throughout Ryan's reign, the Eagles were criticized by opposing teams for alleged taunts and cheap shots. Cowboys kicker Luis Zendejas claimed Ryan put a "bounty" on him in the Eagles' 27-0 Thanksgiving Day victory in Texas Stadium. Ryan dismissed the charges, but he hurt his own cause when he alienated his boss with derisive comments aimed at "the man in France," team owner Norman Braman, who owned a home in France.

Buddy had built a volatile team, given to high degrees of emotion and erratic momentum swings. The offense fed off turnovers caused by the frenzied defense. Ryan's philosophy was that pressure wins games.

"Neanderthal ball," Parcels called Ryan's coaching style, but it was just the kind of defense that frustrated Parcels' conservative, ground-bound offense. As Bears' defensive coordinator in '85, Ryan's 46 schemes helped shut out Parcels' Giants, 21-0. From 1988-90, when Buddy had built the Eagles into a perennial power, Ryan went 5-1 against Parcels.

Buddy had less success against another NFC East division rival, Gibbs, whose multiple offenses matched up well with Buddy's power defense and allowed the Redskins to win five of seven meetings, including their 1990 playoff game that hastened Ryan's firing.

The Ryan era officially ended the next day, and Braman promoted offensive coordinator Rich Kotite to head coach. Ryan's departure was the first shakeup of one of the dominant defenses in recent NFL history. Brown died in an off-season auto accident, and the Birds dedicated the 1991 campaign to their fallen mate. Philly became just the third team in modern pro football history (along with the 1969 Kansas City Chiefs and 1975 Minnesota Vikings) to lead the league in fewest yards allowed rushing, passing, and in total defense.

Cunningham's season-ending injury in the season opener at Green Bay caused the Birds to miss the playoffs, but they rebounded the next season and finally gained that elusive first postseason victory with a wild-card win at New Orleans. Their season came to an end the next week with a one-sided loss at Dallas, and the breakup of the Birds began in haste the next several seasons.

How good were these Eagles? They were good enough to be a contender for Super Bowl honors from 1988-92, but never quite good enough to that next step and dominate in the postseason. Their defense was a notch below the dominant units fielded by the '85 Bears, '86 Giants and 2000 Baltimore Ravens, but comparable to another Super Bowl squad, the 2002 Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

But with their throwback black cleats and blue-collar style, with their boasts and bombast, these hard-edged Eagles struck a chord with the City of Brotherly Shove. The legacy of Buddy's Birds, it seems, isn't to be found in wins and losses, but in their lasting identification with Philly fans.

During the 2004 Super Bowl run launched by the current Eagles of Andy Reid and Donovan McNabb, a Philadelphia sports talk radio station held a poll asking listeners to name their favorite Eagles coaches and players from history. By an almost 2-1 margin, Ryan was the choice over Reid and the 1988-90 Eagles were the pick over the NFC champions of 2004.

"I've never been fired for winning," Ryan told the Philly media in a parting shot at Braman in January, 1991.

Buddy wasn't fired for winning, but for not winning enough, and not winning the big ones. Why the Eagles underachieved remains something of a mystery.

But while Buddyball never brought a Lombardi Trophy back to Philly, Ryan and the Birds won something more - the collective heart of the city's hard-core sports fans.

Who to Root For?

By Roger Gordon

*Holy !#\$**. I was numb, terrified to leave the room. I stayed there two hours, and with good reason - my football team had just won.

Why, one might ask, was I afraid to step foot out of my bedroom just because the professional football team I rooted for was victorious in a crucial game? Because my older brother Bruce was in the vicinity - the same house I was in.

The Oakland Raiders had just defeated the Cleveland Browns, 14-12, in the "Red Right 88" AFC Divisional Playoff game at the Stadium. Oakland's nailbiting victory was all but clinched when Raiders strong safety Mike Davis intercepted a pass by Browns quarterback Brian Sipe with less than a minute remaining. The Raiders simply ran out the clock. Sipe's floater closed the book on what'd been a thrill-a-minute "Kardiac Kids" season for Cleveland. Oakland, in turn, went on to win Super Bowl XV.

Not only were Bruce and I on opposite ends of the rooting spectrum, me for the Raiders [I'm now a Cleveland fan], he for the Browns, but were also on opposite ends of the house that day, me upstairs, him in the basement. Had we watched NBC's nationally televised game together, not only would it've been an unpleasant situation, but quite possibly an unhealthy one. The scene could've turned ugly, especially for me, due to the final result. My brother, five years my senior, could've inflicted serious damage on my frail 13-year-old body.

For years, Bruce and I would argue about who was better, the Browns or the Raiders, Sipe or ex-Raiders quarterback Ken Stabler [who actually had been traded by Oakland prior to that 1980 season]. It was an ongoing battle, especially on days when the league statistics were published in the newspaper.

"Sipe's got more touchdown passes," Bruce would say, doing his best to irritate me.

"Yeah, he's also got more interceptions," I would retaliate.

Our little family feud came to a crashing climax the Sunday of the Browns-Raiders game, January 4, 1981, an afternoon in which Northeast Ohio, along with the entire northeastern region of the country, was in a deep freeze. The tension inside 907 Twenty-fourth Street NE in Canton likely rivaled that inside mammoth Cleveland Stadium some 60 miles to the north, where the wind chill factor made the 1 degree temperature feel like minus-37 at kickoff.

The game was not surprisingly a defensive struggle. With little more than two minutes remaining, Oakland was up by two had a fourth down and a yard to go for a first down deep in Browns territory. All the Raiders had to do was gain one yard - actually, less than that - *inches* - and the game, for all intents and purposes, was over. The much-maligned Cleveland defense stopped Oakland, and the Browns gained possession of the ball at their own 15-yard line. Sipe, arguably the best quarterback in the NFL during the regular season, proceeded to drive his team down the field to the Raiders' 13-yard line in what the entire city of Cleveland hoped

would turn out to be yet another "Kardiac" finish.

The Browns called time out with 49 seconds left. My nerves were gripping me. This tension was different than most kinds. Here it was, less than a minute to go, my beloved Raiders up by two, and ... *He'll kill me if they (the Browns) lose.*

Football clearly wasn't the only thing on my mind. Knowing full well Bruce would be in a nasty mood if the Browns lost, and even more so since he knew I was pulling for the Raiders (or was I?), decision time had arrived. It boiled down to this: If the Browns won, my team would be eliminated but I'd live; if the Raiders won, my team would advance to the AFC Championship game a week later in San Diego, but I might not be around to see it.

Following Sipe's errant pass, I was unsure of my emotions. I did know one thing. Silence was the word of the day.

Moral of the story: Root for the home team.

POINTS ALLOWED IN CONTEXT

by Andy Piascik

When evaluating defenses, points allowed per game is perhaps the most commonly used barometer. Teams that do well in scoring defense tend to do well in the standings. As with just about any other statistical measure, whether team or individual, points allowed per game is not so helpful when comparing teams across the decades.

In some eras points were hard to come by, while others are marked by lots of scoring. The 1934 Chicago Cardinals, for example, gave up just 84 points in 11 games but did it at a time when the average game featured about 21 points by both teams combined. Only one team has bettered the Cardinals' 7.6 points allowed per game in the 71 seasons since, yet no one would confuse them with the 1963 Bears. The Cardinals didn't even lead the NFL in fewest points allowed that year. Not only that, they finished seven games out of first place with a 5-6 record.

Just eight years later, the Chicago Bears allowed exactly the same number of points in exactly the same number of games. Because the context in which they did it was different, however, they had one of the greatest defensive seasons ever. By 1942, the average game featured about 32 points so the Bears' 7.6 allowed really stood out from the average. Chicago posted an 11-0 record and outscored opponents by an average of 26.6 points, the highest per game point differential ever. About the only thing the Bears didn't accomplish that year was the most important of all - winning the league championship.

In order to better compare defenses from different time periods, it is necessary to establish whether a low number of points allowed was really a low number at the time. Similarly, a points allowed total that on the surface sounds unimpressive may in fact be very good if it was achieved in a high-scoring season. The trick is to quantify each team's points allowed against the scoring backdrop of that season. That's the idea behind Points Allowed in Context and it is determined as follows:

League Points Allowed Per Game (PAPG)- Team A

Points Allowed Per Game (PAPG) by Team A

In other words, the key is determining how a team's points allowed compares to the rest of the league in a given season. Using the 1942 Bears again as an example, their 7.64 PAPG is divided into the 16.78 PAPG posted by the rest of the NFL that year to yield a score of 2.2. That is, the Bears defense was 2.2 times better than the average of the NFL's nine other teams in 1942, at least when their points allowed is compared to everybody else's.

As it turns out, that is one of the best marks ever. Only 14 teams in the NFL, AAFC, and AFL have scored 2.0 or above from 1933 through 2005. The 1942 Bears tied with the 1962 Packers for the fifth best Points Allowed in Context score. Here are the 60 best scores of the last 73 seasons (the 64 teams listed account for 4% of the team/seasons of the 1933-2005 period):

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1.) Giants	1944	2.56	32.) Rams	1977	1.80
2.) Lions	1934	2.53	34.) Redskins	1942	1.79
3.) Vikings	1969	2.28	35.) Bears	1986	1.78
4.) Bears	1963	2.22	35.) Broncos	1977	1.78
5.) Bears	1942	2.20	37.) Bears	1985	1.77
5.) Packers	1962	2.20	38.) Titans	2000	1.76
7.) Rams	1975	2.18	39.) Chiefs	1969	1.75
8.) Browns	1946	2.16	40.) Eagles	1948	1.72
9.) Eagles	1949	2.12	41.) Bears	1934	1.71
10.) Giants	1939	2.10	42.) Browns	1947	1.69
11.) Dodgers	1933	2.07	42.) Giants	1951	1.69
12.) Colts	1968	2.06	44.) Browns	1954	1.68
13.) Ravens	2000	2.04	45.) Oilers	1967	1.67
14.) Eagles	1950	2.03	45.) Dolphins	1972	1.67
15.) Browns	1950	1.99	45.) Vikings	1976	1.67
15.) Vikings	1971	1.99	48.) Giants	1941	1.66
17.) Giants	1938	1.98	49.) Browns	1953	1.65
17.) Steelers	1976	1.98	49.) Vikings	1973	1.65
19.) Bears	1948	1.94	49.) Bears	2005	1.65
19.) Colts	1971	1.94	52.) Chargers	1961	1.64
21.) Packers	1966	1.93	53.) Vikings	1975	1.63
22.) Chiefs	1968	1.92	54.) Bears	1933	1.61
22.) Vikings	1970	1.92	54.) Browns	1994	1.61
24.) Giants	1950	1.91	56.) Rams	1967	1.60
25.) Falcons	1977	1.90	57.) Bears	1936	1.59
26.) Redskins	1939	1.89	57.) Redskins	1945	1.59
27.) Steelers	1946	1.86	57.) Lions	1969	1.59
28.) Dolphins	1973	1.85	60.) Browns	1949	1.58
29.) Lions	1962	1.82	60.) Colts	1967	1.58
30.) Browns	1948	1.81	60.) Dolphins	1971	1.58
30.) Steelers	1975	1.81	60.) Raiders	1973	1.58
32.) Browns	1951	1.80	60.) Packers	1966	1.58

The high ranking of teams like the 1963 Bears is not surprising. The two highest scoring teams are generally not thought of as among the best defenses ever, however. That the 1933 Dodgers make this list at all, let alone at #11, indicates that the system has some flaws. On the other hand, the vast majority of the teams on the list are either champions or championship caliber. The combined winning percentage of the 64 teams is over .800. And I think it's safe to say that none of the popular candidates for best defense ever are missing.

In no season are there more than three teams. Three teams from 1950 - the Eagles, Browns, and Giants - are in the top 24. Other years with three teams are 1948 (2 NFL and 1 AAFC), 1967 (2 NFL and 1 AFL), 1969 (2 NFL and 1 AFL), 1971, 1973, 1975, and 1977. The longest stretch with no Top 64 team is seven seasons (1978-1984 and 1987-1993). That only seven teams since 1977 are on the list is undoubtedly another manifestation of parity. The 1946 Steelers, 1950 Eagles, and 1977 Falcons finished with the worst winning percentage at .500.

The 1985 Bears, a very popular candidate for Best Defense Ever, come in much lower than expected at 37. The score of the 1986 Bears is actually a fraction higher. Four teams from the

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AFL make the list, as do all four Browns' teams from the AAFC. Cleveland makes the list in eight of nine seasons from 1946-54, missing only in 1952. The Vikings made it six times in eight seasons from 1969-76, missing in 1972 and 1974. Those stretches indicate long-term defensive greatness.

By this measure, the years from 1967-77 are a kind of golden age of dominant defenses as 24 of the top 64 are from that period. In addition to the great defenses of the Vikings, Dolphins (1971-73), and Steelers (1975-76), the sometimes overlooked units of the Colts (1967-68, 71) and Chiefs (1968-69) are from that period.

These 64 account for 4% of the team/seasons of the 1933-2005 period. The Bears made the list in both 1933 and 2005 and their total of nine is tied with the Browns for the most. The Giants and Vikings both place six times. The next best total is three, something achieved by seven teams.

It would be remiss to not mention the 16 teams from before 1933 that score higher than 2.56. In 1922 Canton scored a mindboggling 7.98 (1.25 points allowed per game compared to 9.97 by everybody else). Maybe that year the Bulldogs had the best defense of all time. Some of the other scores are likewise off the charts when compared to those that came after 1932.

Here is the list of 16:

1.) Canton Bulldogs	1922	7.98
2.) Green Bay Packers	1929	6.15
3.) Canton Bulldogs	1923	5.24
4.) New York Giants	1927	5.23
5.) Buffalo All-Americans	1921	4.38
6.) Akron Pros	1921	4.09
7.) Duluth Kelleys	1924	4.04
8.) Pottsville Maroons	1926	3.86
9.) Green Bay Packers	1924	2.89
9.) Chicago Bears	1932	2.89
11.) Detroit Panthers	1925	2.83
12.) Chicago Bears	1921	2.81
13.) Rock Island Independents	1924	2.80
14.) Frankford Yellow Jackets	1926	2.78
15.) Chicago Bears	1922	2.66
15.) Providence Steam Roller	1928	2.66

BY A COIN TOSS

By Timothy Holland

In 1944 the Chicago Bears and Detroit Lions tied for second place in the west, so it was decided that a coin would be flipped to figure out who would choose before whom in the college draft. The Bears had their eye on a quarterback out of Northwestern by the name of Otto Graham, but they lost the toss and, to their surprise, the Lions chose him. Before Graham could play for Detroit, the Navy grabbed him and he went to Great Lakes Naval Academy where Paul Brown was coaching the football team. Brown had coached at The Ohio State University while Graham had played for Northwestern, so he knew what kind of an athlete Otto was.

After the war, in 1946, the All-America Football Conference came into existence and Brown and Graham became head coach and quarterback respectively for the Cleveland Browns. Over the course of the next four years, the Browns would win every league championship in AAFC history before the league folded and Cleveland along with San Francisco and Baltimore were taken in by the NFL.

In 1948, the Bears brought Texas University quarterback Bobby Layne into the fold. Layne stayed with Chicago for one year before George Halas traded him to the New York Bulldogs as a favor to team owner Ted Collins for \$50,000 and two draft picks. It did not seem to be a bad move at the time considering that the Bears had Johnny Lujack to play the quarterback position and drafted George Blanda to back him up. But over the next decade, it would prove quite costly.

After one year with the Bulldogs, Layne was traded to the Detroit Lions, (yes those Detroit Lions), in exchange for fullback Camp Wilson. To the chagrin of "Papa Bear" Halas, the Browns, after joining the NFL in 1950, would go on to represent the Eastern Conference in the league championship game in each of their first six years in the league. A span that stretched from 1950 to the retirement of their quarterback, Otto Graham, after the 1955 season. The Browns would win the championship three times in those six years in 1950, '55, and '56.

Even worse for Halas, Bobby Layne's Detroit Lions would end up being Cleveland's biggest nemesis. They would play the Browns in three consecutive championship games from 1952-1954, defeating them in the first two games. But Graham would retire by getting the last laugh with a victory over the Lions in 1954 and his last championship in his final game against the Los Angeles Rams in 1955. Layne would stay with the Lions through the 1957 season before being traded once again, this time to the Pittsburgh Steelers. During his time in Detroit, Layne had also been a part of three championship teams. So from 1950 to 1957, George Halas had to watch as a quarterback that he had lost to a coin flip and another league and another that he had traded as a favor to a friend whom that friend traded to the team that beat him in that coin flip, won six of the league's eight championships while the Bears lost their only title game appearance in 1956 to the New York Giants. In fact, the Bears would not win another championship until 1963. The year after Bobby Layne retired. And, not coincidentally, both Graham and Layne are in the pro football hall of fame.

This is not the only time that Halas would lose a great quarterback to the flip of a coin. In 1969

the Steelers finished tied with the Bears for last place, both with records of 1-13. Each team coveted a young quarterback from Louisiana Tech by the name of Terry Bradshaw. Once again a coin was tossed and once again the Bears lost. The Steelers took Bradshaw with the first pick in the 1970 draft and went on to win four Super Bowls from 1974 to 1979. The Bears would make the playoffs only twice during the span of Bradshaw's career which lasted from 1970 to 1983, ironically the same year that Halas died. Immediately thereafter Chicago went to the playoffs four straight years and won the Super Bowl in 1985. And Bradshaw, like Graham and Layne, would also go on to the hall of fame.

J.D. SMITH AND THE 1961 49ERS

By Coach Troup

Expectations for the 49ers were high as the 1961 season began. San Francisco finished the 1960 season tied for second place with the Detroit Lions as the 4gers won five of their last seven games. The 4ger defense allowed the fewest points in the league; and in their seven victories allowed only 79 points. Coach Howard "Red" Hickey was entering his third season as head coach and had won 14 of the 24 games he had coached. He not only had many returning starters, but due to successful trades with the Steelers, Colts, and Cowboys; the Niners had nine selections in the first five rounds of the draft, including three first round picks. San Francisco was ready to take on the Redskins at Kezar on September 17th to open the season, although some questions remained from last year at the vital quarterback and middle linebacker positions. J.D. Smith had played cornerback on defense and both halfback and fullback on offense since joining the 4gers from the Bears during the 1956 season. He had been chosen to play in the Pro Bowl after gaining over 1,000 yards rushing in 1959. Rather than lining up in the conventional T-formation offense, Coach Hickey elected to begin the season in a double wing formation, with the quarterback lined up five yards behind the center as a tailback - "The Shotgun". How would an exceptional athlete like JD Smith respond to being moved to a wingback position after three years aligned in a traditional offensive set? San Francisco opened the game in the shotgun and successfully moved the ball against a weak Washington defense. San Francisco jumped out to a 21-3 half-time lead, and cruised home 35 to 3. J.D. Smith contributed 93 yards rushing on reverses and counter plays out of the shotgun, and sweeps and powers out of the T-formation. He also caught a 34-yard touchdown pass from John Brodie. The defending western conference champion Packers were next on the schedule, and the Niners left the Wisconsin city on the short end of a 30-10 score. The only 49er to perform well offensively that day was J.D. Smith as he gained 102 yards rushing on just 16 attempts.

The Detroit Lions had finished ahead of the 49ers the year before, and began the 1961 season with victories over the Packers and Colts. October 1, 1961 is a day to remember in 49er history as San Francisco crushed the Lions 49-0! After Pro Bowl cornerback Abe Woodson intercepted Earl Morrall, J.D. Smith capped a short drive with a 5-yard TD run. The rotation at tailback began to pay dividends as both rookie Billy Kilmer and Bobby Waters scored on running plays. San Francisco led at the half 21-0. Woodson returned the second half kick-off 98 yards for another touchdown and the slaughter was on. In shutting out the Lions, the 49er defense limited the Detroit ground game to just 55 yards on 25 attempts, and intercepted four passes. Free safety Dave Baker intercepted twice to continue his stellar play - 13 interceptions in his last 8 games.

Returning home to play their bitter rivals from Los Angeles, the 49ers continued to play superb overall football as they shut-out the Rams 35-0. Back on the road to play the expansion Vikings, and the game proved to be eventful as former 4ger all-pro Hugh "The King" McElhenny scored twice on statue of Liberty sweeps as they led San Francisco 17-14 at the half. Billy Kilmer scored four rushing touchdowns to cap the 49er come-from-behind victory 38-24. He also gained over 100 yards rushing for the third consecutive game. With the ankle injury to rookie Dale Messer the week before, an adjustment had to be made in the offensive substitution pattern. Since Abe Woodson was such a great return man with a kick-off, punt, or interception (and had been an excellent running back for the University of Illinois) he was the natural choice

to move to offense.

Woodson would start at both cornerback positions, and at wingback during the 1961 season - one of the last men to start both ways during a season. With so many stories to write about - J.D. Smith had become just a cog in the 49er offensive wheel. He had another excellent day against Minnesota with 73 yards rushing on just 11 attempts. In the past this man had proven to be a workhorse -- his role had certainly changed. Tied for first with Green Bay at 4-1, could this finally be the year that San Francisco would win the western conference outright? In their four victories San Francisco had allowed only 293 yards rushing on 93 attempts (3.15 a carry), while the Niner offense had just set a team record with 324 yards rushing in one game (Minnesota).

The tailback rotation of Brodie, Kilmer, and Waters had proven effective for all the reasons coach Hickey envisioned. On October 22nd, 1961, the 49er football world began spin in the wrong direction as San Francisco journeyed to the windy city to take on the Bears. Defensive coordinator Clark Shaughnessy (with help from secondary coach George Allen) devised a defense that would use a five-man line deployed to penetrate up the middle to limit tailback plunges, and defensive ends aligned wider to turn back sweeps and reverses by the wingbacks. Since John Brodie had proven the most effective of the three tailbacks in completing the deep pass the Bears used five defensive backs (nickel coverage) when he entered the game. The Bears resounding 31-0 victory became the talk of the league as questions now arose in regards to the 49er offense and the use of the shotgun.

San Francisco returned to the road, this time to Pittsburgh to play a tough and improving Steeler team. This game brought a similar result as the 49ers lost again this time 20-10. Pittsburgh also used a 5-man line. They utilized their linebackers and defensive backs in a different deployment than the Bears, but with almost as much success.

Now 4-3 and tied for third in the standings, the 49ers returned home to play the Lions, also 4-3. Detroit led at the half 17 -0, and San Francisco sure needed a spark. Abe Woodson again burned the Lions, this time with an 80-yard punt return for a touchdown. Late in the fourth quarter Lion quarterback Jim Ninowski engineered a long drive to put the Lions back ahead 20-17.

On the kickoff, Jim Martin approached the ball with orders to squib kick. There was less than a minute left in the game. J.D. Smith fielded the kick and returned the ball 24 yards to his own 44 yard line. With 25 seconds left and no timeouts John Brodie completed two straight passes to J.D., and he fought his way out of bounds to stop the clock. Four seconds remained when Tommy Davis kicked the tying 41-yard field goal.

Though JD Smith now was lining up in his traditional spot in the backfield in the t-formation, and gained a respectable 84 yards rushing in the next game against the Rams; it was not enough as San Francisco lost 17-7. With four home games remaining the 49ers still could salvage their season, but who would provide the offense? The 49er secondary that had played so well during the 1960 season was struggling, and, with the exception of weakside linebacker Matt Hazeltine, the linebacking corps had difficulty showing any consistency. The rematch with Chicago on November 19th began with a Bear touchdown, and then the avalanche of points began as the 49ers outscored the Bears 41 points to 10 as play entered the 4th quarter. Two cosmetic Chicago touchdowns left the 49ers in front 41-31. J.D. Smith gained 67 yards rushing including a beautiful 31-yard run to help the cause, but John Brodie was the difference as he completed 11 of 19 for 322 yards. Fullback C.R. Roberts broke loose for a 54 yard in the third quarter and

as he was about to be tackled R.C. Owens called for the ball, and Roberts complied. Roberts and Owens had the longest run in the league for the 1961 season; a 77-yard touchdown. The 1961 Viking defense got to know J.D. Smith up close and personal on November 26 as he gained 168 yards on 27 attempts to highlight the 38-28 victory. After a 20-17 road loss to the Colts on a fabulous 41-yard pass play from Unitas to Orr in the 4th quarter the 49ers returned home. The Green Bay Packers had won 13 of their past 15 regular season games and had outscored the opposition 435 to 218. John Brodie continued his accurate deep passing as he completed 19 passes for 328 yards against the soon to be champion Packer secondary in the thrilling 22-21 victory.

Now at 7-5-1 the 49ers still had a chance for postseason play in the Play-Off bowl if they could beat the Colts at home. Although J.D. Smith plowed through the Baltimore defense for 93 yards and John Brodie gained 292 yards passing on just 16 completions, it was not enough as the Colts prevailed 27 -24. The 1961 season marked the true beginning of John Brodie as the 49er quarterback as he gained confidence with his accurate passing In the latter part of the season. Brodie completed 101 of 158 (63.92%) in the 8 games the 49ers either won or tied. Brodie averaged an impressive 11.35 yards per pass in these 8 games. When J.D. Smith gained only 148 yards on just 30 attempts in their first four losses, it became obvious to coach Hickey that, if he was going to go back to the T-formation, he had the back to carry the load. For the season, J.D. Smith gained 823 yards rushing, but he had 447 yards rushing in the 7 victories on just 85 attempts (5.25 a carry).

J.D. Smith improved on his rushing totals for the 1962 season with 907 yards to earn his second Pro Bowl selection. He assured his place as one of the most consistently effective running backs in league history. Smith became just the fifth man in league history to total at least 2,639 yards rushing over three consecutive years. Smith accomplished this from 1959-61. The other four runners? All future hall of famers; Jim Brown (4,123), Steve Van Buren (3,099), Jim Taylor (2,860), and former teammate Joe "The Jet" Perry (2,792).

CHARLEY TAYLOR

Rugged Receiver, Great Open-Field Runner Tormented Defenses

By Michael Richman

RB, WR, #42, Arizona State
NFL Career: 1964 -1977 (14 seasons) with Washington
HOF Induction: 1984
Member of NFL 1960s All-Decade Team
Born: Sept. 28, 1941, Grand Prairie, TX

Yes, Charley Taylor could catch passes. That he hauled in 649 in his 14-year career, once sitting No. 1 in the NFL record books, validates him as one of the best ever at doing so.

What he did *after* catching the ball, however, elevated him to an even loftier plane in NFL and Redskins lore. A running back for his first 2 ~ seasons, the 6-3, 215-pound Taylor was a great open-field runner who repeatedly converted short passes into long touchdown runs. He outhustled and outmuscled opponents, and posted an assortment of dazzling moves that left defenders in disarray. He was often unstoppable.

"Once he caught the ball, nobody could tackle him," said Bobby Mitchell, a teammate of Taylor's for five seasons and a fellow Hall of Famer. "He had quick movements and was shifty, and he'd just walk away from people once he got in the open."

NFL Films President Steve Sabol: "Charley Taylor was fantastic at taking a short pass over the middle and running with the ball through a broken field. He was maybe the best ever at gaining yards after the catch. He had some incredible runs. Tackler after tackler missed him. People forget he was once a running back. If they'd have kept the statistic of yards after the catch in his era, he would have some all-time records."

Taylor, who played his whole career in Washington (1964 to 1977), churned out 9,110 receiving yards, one of several feats that rank him among the game's elite. He caught 79 touchdown passes, the No. 1 mark today in Redskins history, and is also first on the team in total touchdowns (90). He earned first- or second-team All-NFL honors six times and was selected to play in eight Pro Bowls. The Pro Football Hall of Fame welcomed him in 1984.

More than glitz and glamour, Taylor was also a powerful blocker who manhandled defenders. He is remembered - albeit not too fondly by his victims - for perfecting the crack back block, which called for coming across the middle and blocking a linebacker or safety in hopes of eliminating them from the play and springing a ball carrier for a long run. Although the crackback was regarded at the time as a dirty below-the-waist block, Taylor said he never took cheap shots and always aimed for defenders in the chest.

"I'll tell you, man, he took down a lot of linebackers," said Hall of Fame middle linebacker Sam Huff, a teammate of Taylor's for five seasons. "When he took them down, they went down. When Charley Taylor was out there, you looked to see who was there."

Huff, a bone-rattler in his own right, felt Taylor's toughness during the Redskins' training camp in 1964, Taylor's rookie year. "He went over the middle, and I decked him and said, 'Look, I could have really hurt you,' " Huff remembered. "'You've got to look and see where those linebackers are so you can dodge them.' He was lying on his back and didn't say anything. When we scrimmaged a few days later, he hit me, and I flipped through the air. When I came down, I was lying on the ground, and he's standing over me saying, 'I've wanted to do that since high school.' I said, 'Okay, we're even.' "

Taylor, a Texas native, played his college ball at Arizona State, where he was an All-Western Athletic Conference halfback. The Redskins, 3-11 in 1963, selected him with the No. 3 pick in the '64 draft and, not long after, Taylor emitted a sign of his pro potential. In a 28-17 loss in the College All-Star game to the defending NFL champion Chicago Bears, he rushed for more than five yards a carry, passed 14 yards for a TO, caught a 5-yard scoring pass, recovered two fumbles and, to top it off, was named the game's MVP.

Ironically, he gave his amazing performance after his coach, Hall of Fame quarterback and U.S. Coast Guard Academy coach Otto Graham, made a pre-game remark that the rookie was "very lazy."

"That was his excuse ... he wanted to play me as a defensive back, not a running back," Taylor said of Graham. "A couple of running backs got knocked out. So I had to go in there."

At Taylor's inaugural training camp, Redskins coach Bill McPeak positioned him as a defensive back. But when running back Tom "The Bomb" Tracy suffered an injury, Taylor replaced him in the backfield. He was an immediate hit, rushing for a team-high 755 yards that season and catching 53 passes - a receiving record at the time for running backs - for another 814 yards. He was named NFL Rookie of the Year after becoming the first first-year player in two decades to finish in the top 10 in rushing and receiving.

"When I got here, I was the best thing since sliced bread," Taylor said. "They had never seen anything like me before." The Redskins, penning accolades about the rookie in their 1964 game programs, thought so, too:

- "The Arizona Kid, Charley Taylor, continues to blaze a trail through the National Football League unmatched by any rookie to ever wear the Redskins burgundy and gold."
- "Charley gives the Redskins backfield something it has lacked for at least 15 years - a truly great running threat. This rookie from Arizona State is a big man in every way: He stands 6-feet-3, weighs 212 pounds and boasts the speed of a sprinter and an eel's elusiveness. He is Mr. Inside and Outside:
- "Except for kicking, Charley does about everything - he runs with a reckless abandon that has terrorized the (NFL) Eastern Division; he catches passes with the aplomb of a (Bobby) Mitchell; and when the occasion calls, he passes himself."

At the time, Taylor dreamed of becoming the next Jim Brown, then the league's premier running back and perhaps the best ever. "Every young player coming in during that time wanted to be like the man because he was awesome," Taylor said. "He was a fantastic player. Why not pattern yourself after him?"

It wasn't to be. Taylor's old adversary, Otto Graham, who became the Redskins' coach before

the 1966 season, moved him to split end seven games into the year. Taylor said Graham was impressed that his star running back could find openings downfield as a receiver and gain lots of yardage after catching the ball. The coach also wanted a backfield featuring 225-pounders Joe Don Looney and Steve Thurlow, Taylor noted.

Taylor, who rushed for nearly 1,500 yards in his career, said he initially felt a "fear" of playing on the outside. But working one-on-one with Mitchell and watching game films of Colts great Lenny Moore, two players who made the same transition before him, eased the switch, he acknowledged.

The transition, in fact, was seamless for No. 42. With balls aimed his way from the golden arm of quarterback Sonny Jurgensen, he led the NFL in receiving in 1966 (72 catches, 1,119 yards, 12 TDs) and 1967 (70 catches, 990 yards, nine TDs). In the latter year, he played in his fourth Pro Bowl in as many seasons.

"Charley was the go-to guy," said Steve Gilmartin, the Redskins' radio play-by-play man at the time. In other words, if you want to pull out a ball game, 'Where's Charley, where's number 42?' He was a warrior, a tremendous player ... big, fast, aware of everything on the field."

In the coming seasons, Taylor remained one of the league's premier receivers, despite enduring an assortment of injuries that short-circuited his playing time. He averaged 54 catches on a mostly run-oriented offense from 1972 to 1975 and set the NFL's all-time reception record with his 634th catch on Dec. 21, 1975, a mark that has been broken several times over. His 1975 season capped another string of four straight Pro Bowl appearances.

All the while, Taylor's rugged body allowed him to thrive in an era when defenders enjoyed wide latitude for hitting receivers, who could be jammed at the line or knocked off stride in the middle of a pattern, tactics that are illegal today. Taylor outwitted and outworked those covering him.

"I wasn't fast as a lot of those guys," he said. "But I would say, 'We've got to play four quarters. In the fourth quarter, I'm going to be at the same speed as I was in the first. I'm going to wear that (defensive back) down to where we've both got the same speed.' That's the way I'd approach the game. 'Hey, you might run with me in the first quarter. But the fourth quarter is going to be mine.' "

Furthermore, Taylor said, a look into the defender's eyes signaled whether the receiver would have a great game. "You lined up against (Hall of Famer) Lem Barney, and Lem is looking you dead in the eye, and you're going, 'This guy's got his mind made up. He's done his homework. He knows what he wants to do.' But you go up against a guy who looks in the backfield, looks back at you, looks over there. He's undecided about what the hell he wants to do on this play or the next play. Those kinds of guys you're sort of like, 'I got this guy.' "

After missing the '76 season due to a shoulder injury, Taylor caught 14 passes in 1977 and called it quits. Two years later, he became a Redskins scout and spotted Syracuse running back Art Monk, who was drafted by the Redskins in 1980 as a receiver and eventually broke two of Taylor's coveted team records: total receptions and receiving yards. Taylor then coached the Redskins' receivers from 1981 to 1993, a glorious period when the squad won three Super-Bowls, and molded such receivers as Monk, Charlie Brown, Gary Clark and Ricky Sanders into dominant players.

Today, the man known as a Redskins institution boasts that he bleeds burgundy and gold.

"I had a wonderful relationship with the Redskins for almost 30 years," he said. "I took care of them, and they took care of me."